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NSC BRIEFING

23 April 1958

SOVIET LEADERSHIP

- I. *stem* Khrushchev has issued what may be a last warning to domestic opponents of his policies.
- A. Pravda editorials on two successive days last week roundly attacked Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovich--who were thrown out of the Communist party presidium last June--for their opposition to Khrushchev's policies for industry and agriculture.
- B. The editorials plainly implied that resistance to Khrushchev's latest innovation--the transfer of farm machinery from the state-operated Machine Tractor Stations to individual collective farms--was of a kind with the opposition of the purged "anti-party group."
1. One of the editorials declared pointedly, perhaps ominously, that the party "has broken and will break all obstructions and obstacles in its way."
- C. Pravda does not pinpoint the sources of opposition, but we have some indications that one of them may be in the Presidium itself.
- X. As General Cabell mentioned earlier this month, we have had several reports that Mikhail Suslov, a Presidium member and second-ranking party secretary is not happy with the new agricultural policy, which actually represents the most radical change in Soviet agriculture since collectivization itself.

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(a) Suslov's public speeches since the policy was announced have been noticeably lacking in enthusiasm for it. His attitude contrasts with that of other leaders, who have fulsomely praised both the policy and Khrushchev personally.

2. Other reports, however, have indicated that the bulk of the opposition to the policy is at lower levels. Khrushchev himself has merely said that "certain economists" have objected to the sale of machinery to the collectives.

II. If Khrushchev is meeting resistance from Suslov or anyone else at that level we can expect the issue to end in another political showdown.

A. With all his power, Khrushchev is not without his vulnerabilities.

1. By taking the premiership he has just about destroyed the last remnants of "collective leadership" and has undoubtedly created apprehensions about a new Stalin.
2. The more powerful he becomes, the more difficult it is for him to delegate power to one of his proteges without antagonizing others.
3. His long effort to woo Tito back into the bloc has taken a severe--perhaps a final--setback.
4. His "new lands" program, after two good years, fell off badly last year.
5. Finally, "Summit" campaign has not gone quite as he planned. USSR has failed to stampede West into conference without adequate preparation--Nikoyan has admitted they overestimated their ability to manipulate Western public opinion.

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B. Khrushchev himself is showing signs of strain. This could be a sign of tension within the leadership or possibly an indication that the weight of the responsibilities he has taken on is beginning to tell on him.

1. The speech he gave on his return to Moscow from Hungary was as cocky as ever but seemed unusually disjointed. The cool reception given him by the Hungarians may have upset him, since the speech showed an acute preoccupation with his own person and prestige.
2. His temper has been running short--his public language has recently been extremely blunt and crude. The Belgian Ambassador to Moscow, who last week accompanied the Belgian Queen Mother on a formal call on Khrushchev found him in a very bad humor. When the ambassador disclaimed any knowledge of alleged US bomber flights near Soviet borders Khrushchev told him he ought to be informed instead of spending his time drinking tea.
3. Monday, at a diplomatic reception in Moscow, he went to the see for his latest figure of speech. Referring to the Westerners present he said: There are...Ambassadors here who would like to spit on Communism. But let's not let who can spit farthest, like camels in a cage. Instead, let's compete. We have to maintain minimum sanitary conditions.
4. In this connection, Soviet diplomatic behavior has recently had some curious features which may betray some uneasiness behind the scenes. On the 16th of April Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov after a short telephone conversation,

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hastily

~~Smith~~ withdrew a note which he had just handed to Ambassador Thompson. A new note delivered the following day was not noticeably different in those parts which Thompson had had a chance to read, but evidently a last minute change in some detail was called for.

5. Recent Soviet uncoverings at the UN also have had overtones of confusion, although it is quite possible that the charges against the US were intended from the beginning merely as a propaganda diversion, with no expectation that they could win Security Council endorsement.

III. Despite these indications of continuing opposition to his policies and of personal strain, we think Khrushchev is still in firm command and that a challenge to his leadership would entail formidable risks.

- A. There are no signs that opposition to the CPS reorganization has delayed it or watered it down.
- B. Khrushchev's role as the regime's prime spokesman is undiminished.
- C. Embassy Moscow has noted that Khrushchev is now the object of a press treatment which recalls the post-war Stalin and that he himself has adopted the Stalinist mannerism of referring to himself in the third person.

IV. As his power has grown, Khrushchev has shown himself increasingly impatient of restraint.

- A. We do not see him as having untrammelled authority even yet, but we think that anyone guilty of direct opposition or merely of foot-dragging is likely to go the way of Molotov, Malenkov and

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